

Although I am a musician, my main interest in how the airwaves are managed has to do with the free flow of diverse information necessary to maintain a vibrant democracy. I listen to public and listener-sponsored community radio every day, but rarely to commercial stations which are so bland as to be mind-numbing.

I've written a dozen songs or so, two have been released on a compilation CD. I'm unsigned, have no hits. I perform a couple of times month, locally. I am mostly playing backup now for another artist who I think has the talent to have a good shot at making it.

Local community-sponsored radio has a diverse range of music and has played my tunes on the air. They have also interviewed me. Commercial radio is a wasteland, nonstop cookie-cutter vanilla chatter and cloned tune factory dreck.

Relying on market forces to define an information channel with such a huge impact on popular and political culture is a mistake. It inevitably leads to a dumbing-down to the lowest common denominator of discourse.

The practice of voicetracking is not consistent with serving the best interests of local communities. It should be banned or severely curtailed. At a bare minimum, when voicetracking is deployed stations should be required to clearly identify its actual origin and that it was pre-recorded.

National playlists, such as those controlled by ClearChannel and other media giants, are an incredible disservice to art and free thought. It's like driving down America's highways: everywhere the same mall with the same stores, the same fast food. The same with music, everywhere the same bland chatter.

There needs to be room for the soul of America on the radio dial. Musically, this is expressed by the thousands of singer-songwriters and garage bands who don't stand much of a chance of being heard, but who often have quite compelling or interesting statements to make.

The FCC could better serve the American Citizenry by requiring at least a portion of playlists to be determined locally. Further, a requirement to assign a small percentage of the playlist unsigned and/or local acts would be in the best interest of listeners and stations; stations could compete partially on the basis of how well they identify fresh, unknown acts. There are excellent technologies in place to help them do so; garageband.com is an example. At gargageband.com DJs and station managers can easily find music in many genres, with quality ratings by a community of musicians. It can be a simple thing to try out something new.

LPFM license should be made as widely available as possible. In the interests of diversity and fairness, the FCC should limit the percentage of these (and higher-power stations) that are given to explicitly religious stations. It is very frustrating to search the left end of the dial and hear one preacher after another, with only one NPR or local community-supported station wedged in.

I appreciate that the FCC is considering these matters. I trust that the commissioners will act in the best interests of the diverse range of radio audiences across the country.

